

CLAIMS

Please amend the claims as follows.

1. (Currently amended) A nonwoven fabric comprising:

at least two separate but interconnected fibrous layers having discrete voids between the fibrous layers, wherein the fibrous layers comprise a base layer and an upper layer: [[.]]

wherein said fabric comprising base layer and upper layer comprise a continuous array of hydroentangled and consolidated fibers in each of the layers as well as discrete interconnections so as to provide discrete voids between the two layers of fabric, said fabric having a permeability sufficient to enable storage of fluids within the voids; and

wherein the base layer is disposed below the voids, the upper layer is disposed over the voids, and the base layer and the upper layer are interconnected between the voids such that the voids are bounded in all directions by hydroentangled and consolidated fibers.

2. (Canceled)

3. (Previously presented) The nonwoven fabric according to claim 1 characterized in that the voids comprise a plurality of channels.

4. (Currently amended) The nonwoven fabric according to claim [[2]]
3 characterized in that the channels have a substantially cylindrical or tubular shape.

5. (Canceled)

6. (Previously presented) The nonwoven fabric according to claim 1 characterized in that the thickness of the nonwoven fabric is from 1 mm to 9 mm.

7. (Previously presented) The nonwoven fabric according to claim 1 characterized in that the area density of the nonwoven fabric is from 40 to 300 g/m².

8. (Previously presented) The nonwoven fabric according to claim 1 wherein the voids comprise discrete channels within the body of the fabric.

9. (Canceled)

10. (Currently amended) The nonwoven fabric according to claim [[2]] 3 characterized in that the width of the channels are in the range from 0.2 mm to 8.5 mm.

11. (Previously presented) The nonwoven fabric according to claim 1 wherein said voids further comprise one or more functional materials.

12. (Previously presented) The nonwoven fabric according to claim 11 characterized in that the functional material is a member selected from a yarn, filament, wire, wax, gel, liquid, pulp and particle.

13. (Currently amended) The nonwoven fabric according to claim 1 wherein the separate but interconnected layers are formed from a member selected from carded, air-laid, wet-laid, spun-laid, and meltblown webs, and combinations thereof.

14. (Currently amended) The nonwoven fabric according to claim 1 ~~wherein the layers are fibrous, and wherein~~ the at least two fibrous layers are made of comprise different fiber types.

15. (Previously presented) The nonwoven fabric according to claim 14 wherein at least one fibrous layer is hydrophobic and at least one fibrous layer is hydrophilic.

16. (Previously presented) The nonwoven fabric according to claim 12 wherein the functional material is a member selected from a yarn and a filament and said yarns and filaments are made of a member selected from natural, man-made and mineral fibers.

17. (Previously presented) The nonwoven fabric according to claim 12 wherein the functional material is a liquid and said liquid is a member selected from cleaning liquids, detergent liquids, paints, perfumes, cosmetics, lotions, ointments, antioxidants, liquid nutrients and creams.

18. (Previously presented) The nonwoven fabric according to claim 12 wherein the functional material is a powder and said powder is a member selected from superabsorbents, cleaning agents and medicaments.

19. (Previously presented) The nonwoven fabric according to claim 12 wherein the functional material is a particle and said particle is a member selected from a silica gel, activated carbon particles, metallic particles, ceramic particles, polymer particles, phase change material (PCM) particles and seed particles.

20. (Previously presented) The nonwoven fabric according to claim 12 wherein the functional material is a wire and said wire is a member selected from electrically conductive wires, shape memory alloy (SMA) wire and optical wires.

21. (Previously presented) The nonwoven fabric according to claim 12 wherein the functional material is a gel and said gel is a member selected from hydrogels, medicinal gels and hygienic cleaning gels.

22-32. (Canceled)

33. (Previously presented) The nonwoven fabric according to claim 1 characterized in that the nonwoven fabric is suitable for the controlled release of one or more medicaments.

34. (Previously presented) The nonwoven fabric according to claim 1 characterized in that the nonwoven fabric is suitable for containing or delivering one or more cleaning fluids.

35. (Previously presented) The nonwoven fabric according to claim 1 characterized in that the nonwoven fabric is in the form of an absorbent article.

36. (Currently amended) The nonwoven fabric according to claim 35, wherein the absorbent article is a member selected from a wipe, a wound dressing, a baby diaper component, an incontinence pad, and a feminine hygiene absorbent pad, and a thermal insulation material.

37-41. (Canceled)

42. (Previously presented) The use of the nonwoven fabric according to claim 1 in the manufacture of an article.

43. (Previously presented) The use according to claim 42 wherein the article is a member selected from a medicament delivery device, a cleaning fluids delivery device, an absorbent article, a wipe, a wound dressing, a baby diaper component, an incontinence pad, a feminine hygiene absorbent pad and a thermal insulation material.

44. (Previously presented) A method of delivering a functional material which comprises the use of the nonwoven fabric according to claim 1.

45. (Previously presented) The nonwoven fabric according to claim 1 wherein the voids are coated with a vapour permeable PU polymer.

46. (Canceled)

47. (Currently amended) The nonwoven fabric according to claim [[46]] 1, wherein said layers are configured to enable delivery of ~~said~~ a fluid within the discrete voids.

48. (Previously presented) The nonwoven fabric according to claim 1, wherein said fabric has differential permeability.

49. (New) The nonwoven fabric according to claim 1, wherein the fabric has a permeability sufficient to enable storage of liquids within the discrete voids.

50. (New) The nonwoven fabric according to claim 49, wherein the fabric comprises natural fibers.

51. (New) The nonwoven fabric according to claim 1, wherein the discrete voids have a controlled three-dimensional shape between the two fibrous layers of fabric.

52. (New) The nonwoven fabric according to claim 51, wherein each of the plurality of discrete voids correspond to a respective three-dimensional shape of a spacer element removed from between the two fibrous layers during manufacture of the nonwoven fabric.